CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND FIFTY-EIGHTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 31 August 2000, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Petko Draganov (Bulgaria)

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The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 858th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At this point I would like to make a few opening remarks. It is a special honour for me to assume the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I represent a country that is party to all major multilateral agreements on arms control and which has been a member of this august body since its inception. Bulgaria regards international arms control and disarmament as a priority in terms of its national security doctrine. Thus, my Government has a vested national interest in the work of this Conference and I can assure you of my delegation's total commitment in carrying out its important assignment.

At the outset, let me pay tribute to my predecessors, Ambassadors Harald Kreid of Austria, Iftekhar Chowdhury of Bangladesh, Sergei Martynov of Belarus, Jean Lint of Belgium and Celso Amorim of Brazil. They have guided this Conference with tireless effort and skilled diplomacy through what has been another year of doubt and, sometimes, frustration. My predecessors have all diligently tackled the challenge before us with the courage and the finesse that it requires. Each and every one of them has covered some ground, explored some territory and in this way moved our Conference a little closer to consensus.

I will strive towards that same goal, building on what has been achieved so far. Ambassador Amorim jokes that he has never received so many congratulations for having failed. Indeed, in February 1993, when he previously presided over the Conference, it was able to agree on the organizational arrangements which permitted it to get down to work expeditiously on substantive issues. Four ad hoc committees were established as subsidiary bodies at the time. Today we must realize that the political and strategic environment in which the Conference on Disarmament is functioning has changed. The last two years have shown that now we need an even more determined and all-inclusive political and diplomatic effort to agree on advancing the Conference's work in the field of multilateral disarmament and arms control. Our common objective is not out of reach, but it will require still more patience and persistence.

I would not subscribe to the opinions of those who consider that the Conference on Disarmament is in a crisis or even dying. I would rather tend to think that when there is a problem in international relations and global security, then surely there is a job for diplomats, and especially for this Conference. In my view, we are not just mere representatives of our respective Governments here, we are also participants in the formulation of our Governments' policies.

Accordingly, I will continue trying to harmonize our efforts to the best of my abilities, while at the same time representing the collective will of this Conference. The last President of the year's session has a special responsibility to continue consulting, if need be, after the closure of the session and, come that time, I intend to use this prerogative to the fullest. I am counting on all the delegations' usual cooperation.

My other duty as the presiding officer will be to facilitate the preparation of the Conference's annual report. In so doing I shall once again rely on the wisdom and the support of

(The President)

all of my colleagues in this hall, as well as on the proven efficiency of our secretariat, led by Secretary-General Vladimir Petrovsky and his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail. With everyone's assistance I shall endeavour to follow the rules of procedure, which bind us to be accurate and factual in our account of the year's activities of the Conference on Disarmament.

This concludes my opening remarks. I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Israel, the United States of America and Romania. I give the floor to the representative of Israel, Ambassador David Peleg.

Mr. PELEG (Israel): Mr. President, since this is the first time that I am taking the floor under your presidency, I would like to wish you success and to assure you of our support. At the same time, I would like to thank your predecessors, Ambassador Jean Lint of Belgium and Ambassador Celso Amorim of Brazil, for the work they have done. I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and to his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, for their efforts and devotion.

As I will soon be leaving Geneva after two years as the Permanent Representative of Israel, I would like to express my gratitude for the cooperation and goodwill I have enjoyed during this period. I believe that this will also be a good opportunity to share with you some of Israel's views with regard to security and arms control.

At the outset, let me state that, as a relatively new member of the Conference on Disarmament, Israel is proud to be part of it and shall continue to contribute to its work. Israel attaches great importance to the Conference and sees it as a unique forum for freely negotiating issues of arms control and disarmament on the basis of consensus. Moreover, we believe that, as a multilateral forum with a global approach, the Conference must avoid assuming the mandates of other forums, bilateral or regional.

Israel is actively involved in promoting peace with its neighbours. At present, Israel enjoys peaceful relations with Egypt and Jordan, is negotiating with the Palestinians on the issue of permanent status and hopes soon to resume peace negotiations with Syria and Lebanon.

In spite of continued efforts to extend the peace process towards the goal of a comprehensive peace, there are still States in the Middle East which threaten Israel's security and continue to negate its very right to exist. One of these States, Iraq, devoted a major part of its vast income from oil to developing weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. It was engaged in a process of developing these weapons, notwithstanding its ratification of the NPT and the existence of safeguards. It developed chemical and biological weapons and used the poison gas which it had developed both against its own population and against Iran. During the Gulf war, its missiles were fired at Israeli cities and at cities in Saudi Arabia. These same missiles were capable of carrying non-conventional warheads. It should be noted that, besides Iraq, other States in our region have also developed chemical weapons and ballistic missiles armed with chemical warheads and still continue with these efforts.

(Mr. Peleg, Israel)

It is against this background and these threats that we, in Israel, have attempted to fashion our arms control policy. Given the close relationship between peace and security, we believe that peace can be durable only if it provides security to both or all sides. Moreover, we envisage arms control as fundamentally a regional endeavour, incorporating, where feasible, the obligations of international instruments. Universal international instruments certainly have a role to play but we see regionally negotiated arrangements, reinforced through mutual verification by the States in the region, as the key to their successful application. Confidence-building measures have a role to play as a means of building trust, and the arms control and regional security (ACRS) talks were a step in this direction.

Nevertheless, there are some issues that can be effectively covered by international conventions and, in those cases, Israel could accept their application without waiting for circumstances that would allow reciprocity and mutual verification.

In recent years Israel, in its commitment to non-proliferation, has taken several steps, which I shall describe.

Israel has signed the Chemical Weapons Convention but has not yet ratified it. One of the factors which Israel will have to take into account when making a decision as to ratification is that none of the Arab States with chemical weapons capability or suspected of holding chemical weapons have signed, let alone ratified, the Convention. Some have openly declared that they have no intention of so doing. It is a sobering thought for us that some of our neighbours contemplate the use of poison gas against us.

On the issue of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), Israel fully supports the nuclear test ban, we have ratified the Partial Test-Ban Treaty, signed the CTBT and have not made our signature conditional on regional developments. An Israeli delegation was active in the drafting of the Treaty, and we remain constructively involved in the work of the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT Organization. Here our endeavours are aimed at the expeditious development of all the necessary concepts, manuals, procedures and systems needed for a viable and effective CTBT Organization, in accordance with the Treaty. Israel has begun preparations for involvement and integration into the proposed international monitoring system. Although Israel has not yet ratified the Treaty, it is aware of the international legal obligations that a State assumes upon signature of such a treaty, even prior to ratification, and Israel, needless to say, accepts the obligation involved.

Although technically Israel cannot join the Missile Technology Control Regime, it has undertaken to comply fully with its provisions. In another field of non-proliferation supply control, Israel has enacted stringent legislation on export control, thereby ensuring that it is not a source of proliferation.

Israel is a party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), and I am pleased to inform the Conference that, on 24 August 2000, the Government of Israel decided to ratify the amended Protocol II concerning mines, and Protocol IV concerning laser weapons. Although Israel is not a party to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel

(Mr. Peleg, Israel)

Landmines, it has ceased production of anti-personnel landmines and has declared a moratorium on their export and it will be ready to participate in the drafting of an international agreement project for mine-clearance and the rehabilitation of victims of mines.

With regard to the confidence-building measure of transparency in armaments (TIA), Israel supports the principle of the Register and makes an annual report. We do not believe it would be fruitful to widen the scope of the United Nations Register and we feel that efforts should be devoted rather to encouraging States to report to the existing Register. We find it strange to hear some of our neighbouring States call for a vast increase in the scope of the Register, when they fail to submit reports even under the present limited scope.

Mr. President, in conclusion, I would like to reiterate my wishes to the Conference. The challenges are huge, and the international community is still awaiting their accomplishment.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Israel for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. For my part and, I believe, on behalf of the Conference, I would like to express our gratitude for his cooperation during his tour of duty in Geneva and to wish him well in his future endeavours.

I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Robert T. Grey.

Mr. GREY (United States of America): Mr. President, I congratulate you as you assume the presidency for the final month of our session this year. My delegation and I look forward to working with you as you guide us in the drafting of our Conference's annual report, and later on, as we begin our preparations for the 2001 session. You also have our sympathy in that the luck of the alphabet has placed you in the longest presidency of the year.

I would like to speak today on outer space, a topic of great interest to all members of this Conference.

The American space programme was born at the height of the cold war amid a looming rivalry for supremacy in missiles and space. But even then, much of our space effort was directed towards strictly scientific exploration and international cooperation. The plaque left behind by the crew of the Apollo 11 - the first men on the Moon - says "We came in peace for all mankind". Now more than ever, with the cold war a part of history, we still view our space activities primarily as an instrument of human advancement and international cooperation.

Having sent astronauts to the Moon, robots to Mars and spacecraft to the farthest reaches of our solar system, we are today engaged in a partnership of 16 nations to build an international space station. Permanent space station crews will perform long-term research in a range of scientific disciplines, seeking to advance our understanding of life sciences, earth sciences, and materials processing. The international space station will provide a focal point for space operations among the partner nations well into the new century, while serving as a stepping stone for potential exploration of the solar system.

(Mr. Grey, United States)

Current uses of outer space involve an unprecedented degree of cooperation. There is a growing market place in space for commercial services, including telecommunications, weather forecasting and global imaging of the earth's surface. The United States is pleased to have contributed substantially to these efforts, and we will continue to pursue greater levels of partnership and cooperation in this area.

Free access to and use of space for all are central to the preservation of peace and the protection of every nation's security, civil and commercial interests. The United States strongly endorses articles I and II of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, which expressly allow for the free exploration and use of outer space and celestial bodies by all nations. The United States sees no justification for limitations on the right of sovereign States to acquire data from space, and we consider purposeful interference with space systems an infringement on sovereign rights.

The United States is committed, through its national space policy, to the exploration and use of outer space by nations for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all humanity. For us, as for others, the notion "peaceful purposes" does of course allow for activities that support defensive purposes and serve national security goals. Improving our ability to support military operations worldwide, monitor and respond to military threats, and monitor arms control and non-proliferation agreements and activities are key priorities for our national security space activities. These activities, moreover, strengthen international stability and security.

Like others, we rely heavily on satellites to provide early warning against missile attack. Satellites are also indispensable in monitoring arms control agreements. Verification of compliance with the 1963 Limited Test-Ban Treaty, the 1972 SALT I agreements - including the ABM Treaty - and the START I and START II treaties is highly dependent on the use of remote sensing satellites to monitor activity. In the future, verification of CTBT compliance will depend in significant respects on our satellite-based national technical means of verification. These treaties acknowledge the legitimacy of this use of space as "national technical means of verification".

Lawful military uses of space can enhance international peace and security in significant ways and provide broad benefits to the international community. Examples include communications, global positioning, navigation, environmental monitoring and the ability to track movements of large groups of refugees and displaced persons. Other examples include helping States to monitor treaty compliance, combat terrorism and cooperate in enforcing United Nations Security Council sanctions.

A number of standing agreements regulate military activities in outer space. The Limited Test-Ban Treaty of 1963 requires parties not to conduct nuclear weapon tests or other nuclear explosions in outer space. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 puts celestial bodies off-limits to all nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction and prohibits placing in orbit or stationing such weapons in outer space - a far-reaching non-proliferation measure in itself. It also limits the use of celestial bodies exclusively for peaceful purposes and prohibits their use for military establishments or manoeuvres, or for testing any type of weapons. This regime provides the basis for keeping outer space free from the most threatening weapons. The ABM Treaty

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of 1972 prohibits space-based anti-ballistic missile systems or components. In addition, in the 1997 demarcation agreements - which have yet to enter into force - the United States, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine agreed that, to preclude ambiguous situations or misunderstandings related to compliance with that ABM Treaty provision, they would not develop, test, or deploy space-based components based on other physical principles that are capable of substituting for such interceptor missiles.

The activities of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, a standing body of the United Nations General Assembly, are also germane to our consideration of outer space in this body. While it does not deal with disarmament and arms control aspects of outer space, the Committee is concerned with promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of space.

In sum, we can conclude that there already exists an extensive and comprehensive system for limiting the uses of outer space to those that are peaceful and for providing a framework for the legitimate military uses of outer space. We are therefore not persuaded that the multilateral arms control regime, as it impacts on outer space, requires augmentation.

Why, then, do we hear calls for the immediate negotiation of a new outer space treaty?

Certain member States have insisted that the Conference on Disarmament should not and cannot resume negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) unless it also conducts negotiations on outer space issues. This is inappropriate. Member States have agreed on terms of reference for FMCT negotiations, and they have committed themselves in this Conference and in other forums to the immediate commencement of FMCT negotiations. By contrast, they are far from agreement on terms of reference for any possible negotiations on outer space. In fact, even among those who favour negotiations on outer space, there is substantial disagreement on what should be covered.

Those who call for outer space negotiations are putting the cart before the horse. The next logical step would be for member States to conduct a thorough discussion of possible measures related to outer space, to identify proposals for further protections - if there are any - that may be desirable and feasible. Such discussion would have to take into account the need to enhance international peace and security while simultaneously protecting the security interests of States that have substantial assets in outer space and that carry out important activities there. Unless and until there is a convergence of interests and views on this issue, it is impractical to insist that the Conference must negotiate a treaty.

Thus, we do not understand how the objective of such calls can be to bring about negotiations on a topic that is far from ripe and that has not benefited from thorough discussion by this Conference. We are, rather, of the view that holding FMCT hostage to negotiations on outer space is, simply put, a poorly disguised effort to block FMCT negotiations altogether.

On two previous occasions, the Conference, acting by consensus, established an ad hoc committee mandated to conduct negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. In 1998, the United Nations General Assembly, also acting by consensus, adopted a resolution that called on

(Mr. Grey, United States)

the Conference to re-establish its FMCT Ad Hoc Committee at the beginning of its next session. Furthermore, at the May 2000 NPT Review Conference, the 155 participating NPT parties urged this Conference to agree on a work programme that would include the immediate commencement of FMCT negotiations "with a view to their conclusion within five years".

If we combine these commitments with the assurances of which we are all aware in our discussions, it is clear that all the Conference's member States have agreed to support FMCT negotiations. Many delegations, including my own, believe that the Conference needs to resume the negotiations independently, on their own merits. In other words, we believe the decision to negotiate a cut-off treaty should not be linked to anything else. The Conference has always followed a case-by-case approach when it really meant business, and we believe member States should return to that practice.

Others, however, have argued that the Conference must address three priority topics - FMCT, nuclear disarmament and outer space - and that the Conference's decision to resume FMCT negotiations should be accompanied by parallel decisions to establish subordinate bodies that will deal with nuclear disarmament and outer space.

Although the United States remains sceptical that Conference work on these subjects will prove productive, we have made a serious effort to find a middle ground in order to get FMCT negotiations started. With this goal in mind, we have stated that the United States could agree to the simultaneous establishment of subordinate bodies to discuss nuclear disarmament and outer space issues under appropriate mandates. We also agree that the Conference's work programme should include a range of other topics: negative security assurances, anti-personnel landmines, transparency in armaments and three procedural questions - agenda reform, membership expansion and "improved and effective functioning".

What more must member States do before the Conference on Disarmament can get down to work? It is no secret to any in this room that this Conference is facing a crisis of credibility. To us, the way ahead seems simple: get to work in areas where there is agreement to do so. Do not hold everything hostage to everything else.

Mr. President, many of your predecessors have wrestled with the challenge of developing appropriate mandates that would permit organized discussion of nuclear disarmament and outer space issues. In June 1999 we all benefited from perspicacious proposals by Ambassador Dembri of Algeria - influential ideas even though they remained entirely informal. In June 2000, Ambassador Lint of Belgium proposed wording refinements that drew on Ambassador Dembri's efforts and adopted the same fundamental formula: FMCT negotiations plus discussions on nuclear disarmament and outer space. It is significant that Ambassadors Dembri and Lint both reached the same conclusion: FMCT is ripe for negotiations in the Conference, while nuclear disarmament and outer space are not. Your immediate predecessor, Ambassador Celso Amorim of Brazil, also reached an identical conclusion after yet further work.

(Mr. Grey, United States)

With regard to a mandate for discussions on nuclear disarmament, I believe member States have come very close to agreement. A few words remain to be worked out, but I am confident that if the terms of reference for consideration of nuclear disarmament were the only outstanding issue, member States could resolve it expeditiously.

Unfortunately, however, the principle of outer space discussions has not been accepted. To the contrary, we continue to hear calls for immediate negotiations. These are urgently required, we hear, to prevent several grave consequences that might result from United States plans for a national missile defence system: the possibility that national missile defence would upset strategic stability, leading to a new arms race here on Earth; the risk of an arms race in outer space; and the potential for disruption of the arms control process. It is important that we be perfectly clear about what the United States is proposing and why these concerns are groundless.

The United States national missile defence system under consideration is not designed against Russia or China but to defend against a limited ballistic missile attack from certain countries of concern. A system capable of defending against a large-scale attack with sophisticated weapons would be both qualitatively and quantitatively different from that which the United States is considering. Moreover, we believe that confidence-building and transparency measures will provide added assurance that the United States is not contemplating a rapid breakout to attempt to build a complete defence.

Regarding the risk of an arms race in outer space, as I mentioned earlier, the Outer Space Treaty and the ABM Treaty already prohibit key activities associated with many concerns about putting weapons in outer space. The United States fully respects those treaties' constraints. The weapons of the ballistic national missile defence systems that the United States is considering are terrestrial, not space-based. The proposed United States national missile defence system would use land-based interceptors, launchers and radars. It would use satellites only to provide early warning and data on threat missiles. This is a far cry from the weaponization of outer space. Satellites belonging to a number of countries here, including those strongly supporting outer space negotiations, already orbit the earth by the dozens, providing various types of data for military purposes to ships, aircraft and ground forces worldwide. Should we prohibit these, too?

The United States remains committed to the arms control and disarmament process and sees no contradiction between that process and the pursuit of a limited national missile defence system. The ABM Treaty is an integral part of our mutual efforts with the Russian Federation to reduce offensive nuclear arms. Twenty-eight years after entry into force of the Treaty, the United States and Russia are convinced that the ABM Treaty remains an important element in our plans for further reductions. Representatives of our two countries have been discussing how to preserve and strengthen the Treaty in ways that will maintain its fundamental effectiveness under strategic and political circumstances that have changed dramatically in the last three decades. During these discussions, the United States has proposed modifications to the Treaty that would permit the deployment of the initial national missile defence system. The United States remains firmly committed to these bilateral discussions.

(Mr. Grey, United States)

As I mentioned earlier, the objectives of the ABM Treaty are to ensure that each party's strategic nuclear deterrent is not threatened by the missile defences of the other party and to promote the reduction of offensive nuclear arms. The limited national missile defence system that we are developing would not threaten Russia's strategic deterrent and will promote further nuclear arms reductions. The arms control process would not be undermined.

The United States is convinced that the existing treaty regime for outer space has served the international community well. There is no arms race in outer space - rather, there is unprecedented cooperation. Nonetheless, we are aware of the concerns expressed and we are prepared to exchange views on this issue. We are not opposed to the establishment of an appropriate subordinate body for such discussions, in the context of active negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The United States is also convinced that an agreed work programme along the lines proposed by Ambassador Dembri, Ambassador Lint and Ambassador Amorim is supported by the vast majority of the Conference membership and provides the best way - and perhaps the only way - to get this Conference back to work. Those who are not prepared to accept reasonable compromises will bear a heavy responsibility if this Conference continues to be prevented from negotiating multilateral arms control agreements.

Mr. President, I am confident that in your efforts to lay the groundwork for an overall agreement on a work programme at the beginning of the 2001 session, you will continue to promote the same fundamental approach as your distinguished predecessors. In expressing great hope for the success of your efforts, I pledge the active cooperation of my delegation.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the United States of America for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

I now give the floor to the representative of Romania, Ambassador Anda-Cristina Filip.

Ms. FILIP (Romania): Mr. President, First of all let me congratulate you, a distinguished representative of a nation with which Romania enjoys a long tradition of friendship and good neighbourly relations, on your assumption for the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I am confident that your diplomatic skills and experience will be of the greatest help in discharging the special responsibility of the President at the conclusion of a Conference session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate your predecessors on their intensive and constructive efforts aimed at moving the work of the Conference forward, as well as to thank Ambassador Amorim of Brazil for the kind words of welcome he addressed to me last week, on taking up my post as head of the delegation of Romania to the Conference on Disarmament.

I have asked for the floor a week after the Conference on Disarmament once again came close to a major breakthrough in the stalemate which has persisted in this hall for the past two years. Another lost chance, some will say, but the broad cross-regional appreciation expressed

(Ms. Filip, Romania)

for the efforts aimed at seeking and building consensus for the adoption of our programme of work, as well as the readiness of some delegations to support the proposed language, is a clear indication that the willingness to ensure that the Conference lives up to its responsibilities as the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament and non-proliferation has not diminished. And I believe we should see this as a positive outcome, intended to exert a beneficial influence in the near future and for the next session of the Conference on Disarmament. Once again dialogue has proved to be an important tool for approaching the sensitive issues of today's international security environment, while allowing each and every country to express specific national security concerns and preoccupations.

The authorities of my country attach particular importance to the international agreements in the fields of disarmament, non-proliferation of weapons and arms control, as these are part of our national security approach. Halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of conventional armaments has for a long time been a priority for Romania. Moreover, we attach great importance to the role of the Conference on Disarmament in fulfilling this priority, as this forum is the cradle of many international multilateral agreements which have helped to secure stability, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, thus strengthening international peace.

The conclusion of the CTBT in 1996 is standing proof that the Conference on Disarmament can continue to make a contribution to international security and peace. In October 1999, the Romanian Parliament ratified the CTBT, representing an important contribution to the process of nuclear disarmament, to which my delegation is genuinely committed.

In the view of my authorities, starting negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty is a logical step forward to consolidating the process of nuclear disarmament. The re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on FMCT is a top priority for my delegation, which stands ready to participate in the negotiations.

We consider that the provisions and language contained in the Final Document of the NPT Review Conference in 2000 gave clear guidance on the future of nuclear disarmament and its successful conclusion. We also attach considerable importance to the contribution made to this process by the reductions of nuclear weapons and the strategic talks at the bilateral level between the United States and the Russian Federation.

My delegation also stands ready to participate in a debate on the issue of transparency in armaments, one of the non-controversial items of the programme of work. We are witnessing a time when the proliferation of internal conflicts and crises is providing fertile ground for the emergence and consolidation of non-traditional threats, which tend to take shape as a complex combination of terrorism, ethnic cleansing, organized crime and arms trafficking. Past and recent experience shows that the worst affected categories are the civilian population and international personnel engaged in humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations.

(Ms. Filip, Romania)

In the current situation, there is an urgent need to resume the debate in our Conference on the aforementioned issue, in order to prepare the ground for future international instruments intended to promote restraint by both producers and end-users and to strengthen their sense of responsibility, while providing for equal and undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments.

Geneva will soon host the Second Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. This Conference will address a plague affecting, without discrimination, the lives of a wide number of peoples and hampering their social and economical development. Romania is a signatory to the Convention and shares the view that the Conference on Disarmament can make an important contribution to limiting the spread of anti-personnel mines by resuming its efforts to reach a world-wide ban on exports of such mines, a goal which is both feasible and complementary to the objective of the total elimination of this category of weapons.

The issues mentioned before, along with procedural issues, such as the agenda, improved and effective functioning and membership, constitute the priorities of my delegation for the Conference on Disarmament. We stand ready to participate in the debate on other topics of interest to the delegations around this table.

To this end, the Conference must move out of its present situation and start working on the substance of the issues, at least on the non-controversial items of the agenda, in order to create better conditions for finding a mutual and generally acceptable agreement on the remaining issues.

In my national capacity and as coordinator of the Eastern European group, I would like to assure you, Mr. President, of the full cooperation and support of my delegation in your efforts in discharging the important tasks before you, with a view to setting in place the most favourable conditions for a rapid resumption of the Conference's work at the beginning of the 2001 session.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Romania for her statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Iraq.

Mr. AL-DOURI (Iraq) (translated from Arabic): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in the discharge of your delicate and difficult task of achieving the results we all hope for.

Mr. President, it was not my intention to make a statement today, but I find myself forced to do so in view of the attack to which my country has been subjected by the representative of a certain State, the basic objective of which is to try to find justifications, to which I will be referring, for besmirching the reputation of my country.

Mr. President, we all know that this international Conference is the sole negotiating forum for disarmament, to which the international community attaches great importance,

(Mr. Al-Douri, Iraq)

ardently hoping that the Conference on Disarmament will succeed in fully discharging its lofty mission by taking the steps expected of it in the field of disarmament, particularly in regard to weapons of mass destruction and the nuclear weapons held by the State whose representative referred to my country a short while ago. These weapons constitute one of the main sources of the fear and terror that are threatening the future of our contemporary world. For that reason, any agreement in the field of disarmament which the Conference might achieve would allay such fears and give rise to new hopes for the strengthening of international peace and security to which that speaker's State currently poses one of the greatest threats. In the light of this pertinent fact, Mr. President, that speaker's comments fell totally outside the scope of the fundamental objectives of this Conference. Unfortunately, he attempted to exploit this negotiating forum for political purposes and well-known reasons with a view to harming the reputation of my country, one of its member States which, as everyone knows, has been subjected, for almost 10 years, to the most loathsome disarmament operation imposed on any State in modern history, in addition to what my country is suffering in terms of the damage and harm inflicted on its people in all aspects of their lives as a result of the notoriously selective policies pursued by certain permanent members of the Security Council which, under pressure from the State to which that speaker belongs, have not hesitated to adopt double or multiple standards and to blatantly interfere in the affairs of States, including my country, Iraq, under various pretexts by which no one is deceived.

In light of what I have just said, I hope that the work of the Conference on Disarmament will remain far removed from the politicization to which the work of other United Nations organizations, conferences and activities is subjected under pressure from certain major Powers, which are seeking to propagate allegations such as those made by that speaker.

Finally, Mr. President, I wish to make it clear that the reason which induced that speaker to refer to my country with such virulence was to find an excuse or a pretext to justify the non-accession of his country to nuclear-weapon conventions as everyone knows that his State possesses hundreds of nuclear bombs which are threatening not only the Middle East but the entire world. From this rostrum, I defy that State to accept any form of control or inspection by the international organizations competent to verify the existence, or non-existence, of those lethal weapons in his country. With the support of other States, that country is also persistently and obstinately refusing to implement United Nations Security Council resolutions concerning the question of Palestine and its ongoing occupation of the Syrian Golan in an attempt to justify its colonial presence in the region, backed by all its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction which pose a threat to all States of the region, including my country Iraq. Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Iraq for his statement and his kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Myanmar.

Mr. MYA THAN (Myanmar): Mr. President, may I begin by extending the warmest congratulations of my delegation to you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in this crucial final phase of its 2000 session. I pledge the fullest cooperation of my delegation.

I should also like to express our deep appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Amorim, for the invaluable contribution he has made as President of the Conference for the period of July and August and for the important proposal he has put forward on a possible programme of work for the Conference.

I shall not be making a policy statement today. I reserve such a policy statement for a more opportune date at a later stage. I have requested the floor merely to express a few thoughts of mine on the ongoing consultations on the draft programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament.

In a lighter vein, I recall that at the last plenary, our then President Ambassador Amorim, told us an interesting story about the blue rose and the white rose. We appreciate Ambassador Amorim's story very much. There is a saying that imitation is the highest form of appreciation. Allow me, therefore, to follow Ambassador Amorim's example and tell you a story from the folklore of Asia.

At the very outset, I wish to clarify that this story does not originate in Myanmar but in one of Myanmar's neighbouring countries. I shall not however name that country.

The story is about the fertility cult that was in vogue in Asia in those ancient times. Once upon a time, there was a king. The king had many queens, but did not have any children. There was no heir to the throne. It was the ardent desire of both the king and the chief queen that they should have a son who would be the heir to the throne. The ministers and astrologers advised the king to try the idea of opening a "Fertility House". The idea was that the king would appoint a panel of judges to select the best specimen of manhood from among the nation's menfolk, who would offer their services to help their king and queen in this respect. The selected supermen would each then be allowed to spend a few days with the chief queen in the "Fertility House", until she was impregnated by one of them. So it was that, one after another, the selected supermen from the capital spent a few days each with the chief queen in the "Fertility House". No one was successful. At long last, an unknown old man from one of the remotest places in the country came along and said he could help out the king and chief queen.

The old man spent just one night with the chief queen, she fell pregnant. They all lived happily ever after.

Mr. President, the analogy is apt. Just as, in the story, one superman after another spent a few days each with the chief queen in the "Fertility House" so does each president spend a little over one month with the Conference on Disarmament with a view to producing a draft programme of work. Thus far without success. Now it is your turn. Your turn, Mr. President, will be the longest one, covering the intersessional period up to January 2001.

(Mr. Mya Than, Myanmar)

I hope, Mr. President, that you will be able to inpregnate the Conference on Disarmament with new ideas that will help in reaching consensus on the draft programme of work. I wish you the best of luck.

Let me now express a few thoughts, in all seriousness, on the draft programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament. My first point is related to the question of preparing the ground for the draft programme of work for 2001, in the event that we cannot agree on it for 2000.

If in the remaining few weeks we can reach consensus on the draft programme of work for 2000 it will be well and good. But I shall not underestimate the difficulties that face us in that task. It is likely that we shall not have a programme of work for 2000. In such an event, we should aim to do the groundwork for reaching consensus on the draft programme of work at the very beginning of the 2001 session.

My second point relates to preservation of the useful groundwork done by successive presidents. We welcome and encourage you, Mr. President, to continue your intensive consultations to build on Ambassador Armorim's proposal on the draft programme of work. In our view, Ambassador Amorim's proposal, in particular, constitutes an important step and can provide a good basis for further intensive consultations. Delegations, including my own, may have preferred positions. But his proposal reflects the gradual convergence of various positions. We feel that these significant efforts should not be lost. It is, therefore, essential that the efforts of successive presidents, including Ambassador Amorim and your good self, Mr. President, should be preserved and reflected in some way in the Conference's annual report.

My third point relates to the drafting of the report. We believe that the report of the Conference on Disarmament should be simple, straightforward and factual.

My fourth point relates to the draft resolution on the work of the Conference to be considered by the First Committee at the forthcoming Millennium Assembly. As usual, you, Mr. President, will be submitting this draft resolution to the First Committee on behalf of the Conference. We believe that this draft resolution should send a clear political signal: it should reflect the status of consultations at the Conference's 2000 session. It should also reflect the strong determination or commitment of the member States of the Conference on Disarmament to reach consensus on the draft programme of work and to start substantive work at the very beginning of the 2001 session.

I offer these comments in the hope that they will be useful inputs to the ongoing consultations. I believe that the steps outlined above will facilitate our efforts to reach consensus on the draft programme of work for the 2001 session of the Conference on Disarmament, if not for the remaining period of 2000. This will, I hope, enable the Conference to start substantive work immediately and smoothly at the beginning of the 2001 session.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of Myanmar for his wise and perceptive statement and for the confidence that he has placed in me. May I take this opportunity to announce that I have been assured by my authorities that they are able to supply this Conference with any amount of blue roses that we wish.

This concludes the list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this point? That does not seem to be the case.

Before we conclude, let me make an announcement. As Thursday, 7 September 2000, is an official holiday and the Palais des Nations will be closed, I suggest that the next plenary meeting of the Conference be held on Tuesday, 5 September, at 10 a.m. I trust that this suggestion is acceptable.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.